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## Desert to give way to freeway asphalt

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I enjoy the relative quiet of western Ahwatukee Foothills. I love the views out over the Gila Reservation and across to the Estrella Mountains.

Whenever I drive to that area, the thought of a freeway plowing past saddens me. But in another sense, it doesn't hurt much more than watching the beautiful Sonoran Desert get bladed to build homes in that area.

My preference would have been to keep this entire Valley about half its current size. But like so many others, I'm a transplant, though I'd wager that my 47-year residency makes me an old-timer compared with most.

People are drawn here for the climate, beauty and a lifestyle that makes for great marketing posters. In this beautiful Valley, one of the prettiest places to live is Ahwatukee, tucked into the foothills of South Mountain.

But that appeal is precisely why we need a freeway. South Mountain Park is gorgeous, but no one can call the area pristine. It's part of a metropolis, and in this metropolis people like their cars. Until we can get elected leaders to realize that the answer is not just more freeways, we are going to continue to lose land to asphalt.

Ironically, the best proof that mass transit can work is found right here in Ahwatukee. Every day, at least 500 Ahwatukee commuters leave their cars in the park-and-ride lot at 40th Street and Pecos Road. Transit officials believe if there were more buses and parking spots, even more cars would be left behind.

But I'm afraid it's a tale of too little, too late to keep a freeway out. Every traffic projection done by the Maricopa Association of Governments makes it clear that we need a reliever around the south side of the mountain. The vortex of U.S. 60, Interstate 10 and arterial streets from Tempe, Chandler and Ahwatukee clogs the Broadway Curve beyond the ability to expand.

As much as the village hopes the Gila River Indian Community will allow the freeway on its land, that possibility is waning. The tribe has a standing resolution forbidding even the study of a freeway, and it's past time for the Arizona Department of Transportation to get cracking on this job.

As a reporter or editorial writer, I've covered the controversial planned South Mountain Freeway for the past six years. I've attended public meetings where animosity was so ugly it made me worry about the safety of ADOT representatives in the room. But I also know there are many Ahwatukee residents who view the freeway as an important convenience and are ready to have the asphalt laid.

Like so many others in this Valley, they drive the freeways. They have watched as other communities, just as dear to those residents, gave up turf to move people to and fro.

As hard as it is to face, it looks like it's Ahwatukee's turn.

**Patricia Biggs is an editorial writer for *The Ahwatukee Republic*.**

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